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ABSTRACT

The collection of articles addresses current issues in adult and adult basic education in Virginia communities. Titles include: "Goal-Setting in the New River Valley: Teachers' Perceptions and Strategies" (Sue Barton); "What Happens When ESL Students Experience Authentic Work Situations?" (Pat Bowyer); "Orientation to Adult High School Programs Using the Discovery Method of Learning" (Donna Chambers); "Orienting Adults to Program Options Using Small Group Research" (Marti Giese); "Leveled Children's Literature and the Adult Learner" (Marion Harley); "When Learners Write about Work, Family, and Community" (Terry McElhone); "Why They Come: An Exploration into Retention and Motivation in an Adult ESL Program" (Thomas Nowalk); "Designing Instruction for Incarcerated Men" (Beth Rohne); "Guiding Teachers Through Student Input" (Jane Roy); "Taking a Closer Look at Student Retention" (Tina Spencer); and "'The Client vs. the Student': An Analysis of the Refugee Social Service System from the Perspective of an Adult Educator" (Stephanie Wood). (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (MSE)

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Sue Barton, New River Community College Adult Education Program, Dublin, VA

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Orientation to Adult High School Programs Using Discovery Method Learning
Donna Chambers, Fairfax County Public School System, Fairfax, VA

Orienting Adults to Program Options Using Small Group Research
Marti Giese, Adult High School Completion Program, Fairfax, VA

Leveled Children's Literature and the Adult Learner
Marion Harley, Oak Grove Adult Education Center, Westmoreland County, VA

When Learners Write about Work, Family, and Community
Terry McElbone, Literacy Volunteers of America, Louisa County, VA

Why They Come: An Exploration into Retention and Motivation in an Adult ESL Program
Thomas Nowalk, Montgomery County Public Schools Adult ESL Program. Blacksburg, VA

Designing Instruction for Incarcerated Men
Beth Rohne, Virginia Department of Correctional Education, Haynesville, VA

Guiding Teachers Through Student Input
Jane Roy, Arlington Education and Employment Program, Arlington, VA

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Tina Spencer, Newport News Public Schools, Newport News, VA

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Virginia Adult Education Research Network

Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998-1999 Report Series

Goal-Setting in the New River Valley: Teachers' Perceptions and Strategies

Sue Barton, New River Community College Adult Education Program, Dublin, VA.

Background:

Setting goals when embarking on a new phase in one's life has many benefits. Knowing where one is going is motivational. Choosing a direction provides a focus and a time for reflection, assesses strengths and weaknesses, and allows for a plan. I believe that these benefits can enhance an adult learner's educational experience. As a new teacher in an open-door enrollment ABE and GED classroom, I noticed that students were having trouble articulating short-term goals. Since I had participated in a number of staff development workshops and seminars, I noticed that the practitioners with whom I work were struggling to find the right combination of goal-setting strategies and tools to sharpen the focus of their learners. Searching for a way to improve my own goal-setting practices and hoping to offer program enhancing suggestions, I became curious about effective goal-setting strategies used by other teachers in my program.

Inquiry:

How are practitioners in the New River Valley setting goals with ABE and GED students? What are the practitioners' perceptions of the process and the strategies they use?

Data Collection:

What better way to find out the answers to these questions than to ask the teachers directly? I held two tape-recorded focus group sessions, one with experienced teachers and the other with new teachers. I developed questions, ground rules and procedures for the focus groups. Following the sessions, I conducted interviews with focus group participants using questions developed from the transcribed focus group tapes.

In addition to holding the focus groups, I participated in a number of peer discussions about my research at three weekend retreats. I attended program-wide study circle meetings and observed teacher's responses to goal-setting activities. I kept a journal of my experiences and impressions of the research process and of the issue of goal-setting. I reviewed goal-setting articles in Focus on Basics and Progress Newsletter, and collected relevant items from the Equipped for the Future (EFF) listserv.

Since I was also interested in improving my own teaching, I developed a goal-setting activity for my class using the EFF content standard, Plan, and I observed the students' responses to the activity. I collected goal-setting tools used by the teachers who participated in the focus groups and the study circle. During the data analysis stage of this project, I organized the data into the following categories: perceptions, feelings, processes, and strategies.

Findings:

How practitioners are setting goals with students

During the focus group and interview process teachers shared how they were setting goals with their students. Most teachers set goals with students by individual interviews. One teacher used a group goal-setting approach. To aid in documentation, teachers offered checklists to their students, which triggered ideas for potential goals. GED preparatory teachers used standardized assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. From there, students determined what they needed to learn. The teacher who practiced group goal-setting developed goals over a period of time with initial activities centered around values and self-esteem issues. Most teachers conducted informal interview goal-setting sessions while the rest of the class was working independently. Other teachers conducted formal interviews using

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the STEPS process and documenting the session in writing. All teachers tried to encourage students to make a commitment to their education. Most of the teachers used goals to monitor students' ongoing progress.

Goal-setting was defined through the responses produced by the focus groups. Teachers agreed that goal-setting is a process. This process, although unique to each teacher, had similar characteristics. I was able to identify various goal-setting characteristics of a beneficial nature to the student. Goal-setting provides a time of interaction between the teacher and student whereby an atmosphere of trust and rapport can be established. Teachers see goal-setting to be an important life skill to help students focus upon what they want to achieve and what they need in order to progress through their education. Goal-setting propels students forward, provides a teachable moment, and creates a clear picture of goal success.

Practitioners' perceptions of the goal-setting process

During the focus groups and interviews, teachers defined their feelings and their perceptions of how the learner feels about goal-setting. Teachers reported different levels of comfort when setting goals with their learners:

"It is very difficult to set goals with students who are there for two class meetings and don't show up for another two meetings and drift in and drift out...it is hard to get a commitment from them if we do have the time to determine a goal."

"It is a difficult process for me in light of the amount of time I have with my folks...yes, I find it a very difficult process."

Conversely another teacher said, "I like it. That's how I feel. It's fun and the [students] like it."

Some teachers jump into teaching skills after the initial standardized assessment.

"My goal is to get them what they want as quickly as possible so they can move onto the next phase of their lives. I don't try to hold onto them at all."

Teachers mentioned "time" as a major factor when setting goals with students in all types of adult education programs. The program, the teacher, and the student are affected by "time" as it applies to goal-setting. Teachers in the focus group indicated that they must decide how much time they are willing to spend on goal-setting, at what point they are going to introduce goal-setting, and how much time they are going to spend developing the process of goal-setting. Some teachers did not emphasize goal-setting.

"... we need to use discretion [in] the amount of time that we allocate to different students to use for goal-setting. We have to develop the rapport, we have to be able to determine the sincerity level and the determination of the student."

"No, I don't define "goal" with my students. I don't use the word goal. You have mastered the math now and so you can take it over to the English now."

They questioned whether goal-setting should be a priority. Teachers defended their teaching methods during the focus groups. The strategies they chose were ones that they felt worked the best for their students.

Teachers felt that "time" affects students when they are thinking about committing to an educational program, its homework and attendance.

"One of the problems we have [is that] so many of our students are gone by the time we get the goals set so we don't get the chance to monitor it. They come 2 or 3 times and then go home."

Teachers urge their students to set goals when thinking about their steps after they get their GED. Teachers ask their students to consider how long it will take to get the GED and if this is a realistic expectation given the student's educational level.

"They all want to get a GED, most of them want to get a better job, help their children with their homework. And that is it. When you try to break it down into short-term goals they are lost...they can do it but you have to work a long, long time with them in order to get them comfortable enough to do it."

One teacher who used to work with a low level student and found it easy to set goals about how to do basic things found that, "with a lot of the other adult GED students, they just want to get their GED and it's hard to get them to sit down and think about what they need to do to get there...shorter goals."

Time affects programs when they try to plan how long each class period will be, how many classes per week, and how much planning time the teacher will need. According to

the focus groups, the longer a teacher had with the student, the more goal-setting was being done, and the greater the retention rate.

Practitioners' goal-setting strategies

The focus groups and interviews highlighted various strategies that teachers favor when setting goals with their students.

"Mostly it is a matter of asking the questions."

"I got them to write a paragraph on where they wanted to be and what they wanted to be doing in 10 years. I found out a lot about them by doing that. So when I sat down with them to set goals with them, that helped me to get them to focus."

"You have your big goal of getting the GED...let's break it down in smaller increments and see how well you are doing.' I say, 'You have done well on your math so now we will work on English.' I look at that as being a smaller more precise goal."

"We work as a large group, small, and individual. A lot of projects [mapping], collages, writing, fun tests from magazines. We will go to the board and chart who's where. Get the whole class perspective. It's a large group; there is a lot of discussion. "

"I also use goal sheets with mine that are GED goal sheets, preps that I typed up that go along with my Steck-Vaughn texts. [I ask my students to] look and see how much work they have to do to prepare and to look and see how much they [have done]. Schedule out your calendar... [indicate] where you are. At this point [on the calendar] you are done. You get a pretest. The ball is definitely in their court."

"I will share the areas that they are weaker or stronger in and ask which would they prefer to address first. Whatever subject they say they want to work on first, I generally don't have them work over three broad areas at a time."

"They need that positive reinforcement to help them go on to next one. They [can't progress in education] without success in their goals."

Conclusions:

Goal-setting processes are not standardized across the New River Valley. Virginia's adult education handbook provides teachers with a goal-setting/monitoring process called STEPS, however, teachers are finding that they must severely modify it to be compatible with the amount of time they have the students in class and teachers are finding they must modify STEPS according to the students' level. Goal-setting processes are unique to each teacher. Methods of goal-setting relate to how the program is structured. The teacher who set goals over a period of time was in a program where the students attended nine hours per week. Teachers who limited the time spent on goal-setting were in programs where students attended for four hours per week or less.

While valuing goal-setting, most teachers addressed it only briefly in their classrooms. The reasons that they gave for this dichotomy were programmatic issues over which they felt they had no control. Teachers admitted during the study circle that goal-setting is not done well in just one sitting. Most teachers agreed that goal-setting is most effective when done over time.

Teachers shared the conditions under which they taught while explaining why goal-setting was not emphasized in their classes. Teachers cope with open enrollment, various levels of student motivation and commitment, fluctuating students' life situations, mixed ability levels, the lack of adequate classroom space, and documentation mandates.

Some teachers observed that their students were able to articulate goals for their lives, and other teachers observed that students had trouble articulating goals. Some teachers thought in terms of long-term goals and some thought in terms of short-term goals. Discussion fluctuated between long-term goals and short-term goals, identifying similarities and differences. Some teachers spoke about goal-setting in general. Teachers said that when a student comes in and says, "I want my GED," they must assume the student knows this goal is a reachable goal. In many cases, especially for the lower level learners, it is not a reachable goal in a short period of time but may be in a longer period of time.

Teachers offered suggestions as to how the goal-setting process could be improved in their particular situation. One of the suggestions made by teachers is to have goal-setting become a part of the intake process during the sign up ritual. When students have a realistic picture of how long it will be before they are ready to take their GED test, they are better equipped to commit to the process. When long term goals are broken down into manageable short-term goals, the process seems more palatable and doable. Teachers suggested that an intake specialist, who would

complete assessments and goal-setting with students thus freeing the teacher to pursue the instructional functions in programs of four hour classes per week, would be beneficial.

The focus groups and interviews brought out problems and issues that teachers feel surround setting goals in the field of adult education. Accountability and student commitment would seem to be primary factors of student retention. Effective goal-setting, which causes students to gain confidence, was demonstrated in one teacher's classroom to increase student commitment. Programs that spend more time with the students setting goals and stressing self-esteem issues generate greater commitment among their learners.

When states and programs mandate extensive documentation from part-time teachers who already volunteer the time needed to demonstrate professionalism, teacher frustration levels increase. Adult education programs that support their teachers and learners by providing sufficient time to effectively work through the goal-setting process will become benchmarks for other programs to follow. ❑

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Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998-1999 Report Series

What Happens When ESL Students Experience Authentic Work Situations?

Pat Bowyer, Families Transitioning to Work Program, Fairfax County, VA.

Background:

Imagine yourself transported to another land with a different language and strange customs. Imagine, too, that your husband is not with you and you are suddenly the sole provider for yourself and your children. Your new land provides you with some assistance to start your new life but within two years these benefits will cease and you will be on your own. This is the situation in which many of the women in my program who are refugees from Somalia, Kurdistan, Iran, Cambodia, and Vietnam, find themselves.

My job as one of two transition facilitators in the Families Transitioning to Work (FTW) Program is to assist these women by providing instruction in job readiness and basic computer skills for two hours each afternoon. The women also attend intensive English classes for 3 hours in the morning. The class profile ranges from literacy to advanced level English, from 0 years of schooling to high school graduates, and from no work experience to those who have run their own businesses. They are very diverse! How best to assist them in their transition to the American workplace?

As I became more familiar with these women and their life stories, I began to realize how abstract the American workplace was to them and I wondered how to make it more real and more concrete. Opportunities to experience work and a work environment in a guided learning situation seemed like a possible solution.

Inquiry:

What happens when my students experience authentic work situations?

Action:

My colleague and I decided to integrate a work component into our curriculum. We would try to identify some job sites within our community where students could either volunteer or job shadow and we would ask students if they would like to participate and give them a choice of sites. All of the students responded very positively to this proposal. We were able to locate three job sites to begin this experiment: the local Headstart child care center; the public library; and the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. At the child care center and the library, students would act as volunteer aides and at the hotel they would have the opportunity to shadow various hotel workers, such as housekeepers, laundry workers, and kitchen helpers. Students rotated job assignments so not all students were at "work" on the same day. We reserved Mondays and Fridays for group instruction on job related topics and skills so that students were working on a rotating basis on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. On Fridays, the students shared their work experiences with their classmates in the form of a focused discussion. They were asked to complete a simple form for each job assignment; they recorded the name of the job site, the date they worked, the name of the job, and the job duties they did or observed.

Data Collection:

Data collection consisted of a classroom journal that I kept during the course of the project, transcripts of the three Friday focused discussion groups, and the job assignment forms that the students completed about their work assignments. In my journal I recorded daily classroom activities and student initiated conversation. For the Friday discussion groups, which acted as a kind of debriefing session of the work experiences of that week, my colleague led the discussion based on a prepared list of questions; she asked the students to describe what they had observed and done and to reflect

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upon their experiences. I took notes and also recorded these discussions on tape. Five students participated in the first discussion, nine in the second, and seven in the third. Three students participated in all three sessions.

The transcripts of the focused discussion groups provided the richest source of data while my journal and the students' written forms provided supplemental data. The actual phrases used by the students during the discussions were organized into four broad categories: Observations by the Students; Experiences of the Students; Communication by the Students (with each other or with people at their work sites), and Evaluation or Critical Thinking by the Students. Under each of these main categories, a subset of headings was identified as the chart below illustrates:

Observations	Experiences	Communications	Evaluation
Demographics	Job Duties	Exchanging Information	Job Choices
Dress Code	Filling out Applications	Asking Questions	Job Duties
Kinds of Jobs	Problem Solving		Job Sites
Job Duties and Responsibilities			Identifying Problems

Findings:

After categorizing, coding and sorting my data as described above, two observations jumped out. The first observation was how much more the students spoke about work related topics as the project progressed. This was documented both in the transcripts and in my classroom journal. The second and more interesting observation was how what they talked about changed. This was most clearly shown in the analyzed transcripts. In the first discussion group, most of the students' comments centered around their observations of the workplaces and descriptions of their experiences on the job. There were very few questions asked of each other and very tentative evaluative comments were made, such as, "Fun job," "Easy job," or "I'm sorry I don't speak Spanish."

By the second discussion, a shift in emphasis occurred; most of the students talked of their observations again but now the number of evaluative comments was just as great and the types of evaluations ventured were more varied. For example, students stated:

"Hotel very good for talking."

"Like library. I don't like hotel, far away, I don't have car."

"Better to go, see other jobs. We can figure out what are the duties of the different jobs."

However, there was still little communication that occurred between students; their comments were directed towards the teachers.

In the third session, a dramatic change occurred. Not only did the students seem to want to talk more but most of the talking took the form of asking and answering questions of each other, reporting information they had learned from other workers at their job sites, or making evaluative statements. In this discussion time, students asked each other information questions:

"How many rooms?"

"You see people busy?"

"You talk with manager?"

"How many time for break for lunch?"

They also asked questions to learn the opinions of their classmates. One student asked, "Do you think it's hard to work with kids?" And another asked, "You like working in kitchen and cleaning?"

They were able to bring back to the classroom valuable information they had learned from their job sites and they wanted to share this information with their classmates. This included information about salary: "After three months, $8. After four years, $12." About benefits they reported: "Fifteen hundred

dollars for education." And about the workers they shadowed: "She speaking English very well. She say when I come from my country, no English. Then she learned. She very nice."

Their evaluative comments broadened as they began to weigh the information they had gathered:

"Hard job, but not bad for money."

"Woman with big heart for children. For me, it's no easy."

"But you know, in child care you improve your language. You hear a lot of stories...You learn what they learn."

The session ended with the students brainstorming ideas of other job sites where they would like to volunteer or shadow.

My journal entries mirrored similar findings of growth. In March, at the beginning of our authentic work placements, one student who was scheduled to volunteer at the library informed me that she had an interview for a job at the same time she was scheduled to work. When asked about this conflict, she said maybe she would not go to the interview. We discussed ways to handle schedule conflicts. The following month, she told me she had not gone to her volunteer job the previous week because her son had been sick but she had called the library and told them.

Students also began to show initiative in securing themselves volunteer opportunities. After I placed one student in the public library as a volunteer, another student expressed interest in this site. I referred her to her local library and suggested she call to inquire about volunteer opportunities. She did so, filled out the application, and began working there shortly thereafter. This inspired two more students to approach their local libraries for volunteer posts and they, too, began volunteering on a weekly basis.

The job assignment forms that the students completed after their work assignments were less useful to me as a source of data. However, the job assignment form provided the students an opportunity to record details about their jobs which they were later able to use as they filled out job applications. Now students had something to write in the experience section of the application.

Conclusions:

After being placed in authentic work situations, students were able to discuss various aspects of work from identifying who were the workers, what they were wearing, what kinds of jobs were being done, what the job duties were, to what were some of the responsibilities and qualifications for the jobs. They gained valuable work experience as they participated as volunteers, and some secured references from their supervisors. They also developed communication skills, demonstrated by being able to ask and answer questions about their work experiences and to gather information from employees at the job sites. They began to evaluate and analyze different types of jobs and they began to vocalize job preferences and their reasons for them. This applied to students at all levels of English ability, from those at the literacy level to those at the more advanced levels.

My findings indicate that placing students in authentic work situations while they are still receiving classroom instruction can be very valuable. Not only do students develop the vocabulary and experience the culture of the workplace, they do so in a supportive environment. Our Friday discussion groups gave students a forum to share their experiences, to discuss their concerns, and to correct some misunderstandings. It gave great input into our curriculum, as we tried to address issues that arose from these sessions in the classes of the following week.

The logical next steps would be to increase the number of job sites available for the students to sample, and to extend the amount of time they are able to spend at each site. If partnerships could be formed with more businesses, our program could be extended to include other ESL students who are seeking first jobs. Also, if we could develop a way to continue offering support to newly employed students, we could help students address the many challenges they will continue to face as working parents. If our program could find a way to connect with employers to provide these students with continuing workplace training as they become employed, we would I think increase their chances for self sufficiency. Finding the first job can be very difficult but keeping that job is also a challenge. Through authentic work experience we hope to address some of those challenges before our students leave our program, but extending our support to the first job might provide the scaffolding they need on their way to complete self sufficiency. ❑

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Orientation to Adult High School Programs Using the Discovery Method of Learning

Donna Chambers, Fairfax County Public School System, Fairfax, VA

Background:

Fairfax County Public Schools Adult and Community Education offers three distinct programs for adults to receive a high school credential: The General Educational Development Test (GED); The External Diploma Program (EDP); and the Woodson Adult High School credit program. Yet adults wishing to finish high school often choose the GED program without considering other options. There are several possible reasons for this. Many are cognizant only about the GED. Complete information about all three adult high school options is either not reaching the public despite extensive efforts to publicize programs, or the adults who receive the information do not fully understand it. Although all three programs are explained at a weekly one-hour free information session, students often do not attend to learn how to exercise their choices. Often adult learners do not take the time to learn what is needed in terms of skill level to succeed in completing high school. With their expectations being more in line with traditional school, the adults seem to have difficulty taking responsibility for their own learning. "I want to get my GED" is what we often hear. Also, there seems to be a high percentage of non-native English speakers who are test-oriented and believe that the GED is the only acceptable way for adults to receive a high school credential.

With emphasis in society being placed on achieving a high school credential, it becomes important to make learners more aware of options so that they can choose a program that best allows them to achieve this goal. I believe they need to become informed consumers and invest in the process in order to know what it takes to complete a program.

Teachers and other program staff can help adults learn about high school completion options and select the program that best meets their life and learning style needs. With the appropriate information, it makes sense that adults will be able to decide which program is best for them and what learning resources can be applied. Going into this research project, my hunch was that this will make them more invested in taking responsibility for their own learning. Students need to be encouraged in a process to learn so that they can take action and have a voice in their learning.

These beliefs were the basis of my research project. I focused on the process of learning using the discovery method to learn the content. The content was information on the high school completion programs.

Inquiry:

What happens when the learner is given an opportunity to learn using the discovery method?

Action:

A colleague, Marti Giese, and I designed an orientation workshop that became the framework for my research project. The workshop consists of three 2-hour sessions and involves students in learning the content within the process of the discovery method. Participants are told that they are expected to work in a group to learn about one of the three options for finishing high school.

We offered the orientation workshop six times over the course of six months. Four of the workshops were presented in existing learning centers. One was presented at a prison pre-release center and another at a Hispanic family literacy center. Each workshop had an average of 10 adults who volunteered to participate. Whenever a staff member who normally facilitated the

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center was present that staff person was asked to act as an observer and his or her comments and observations were documented.

In the first of the three sessions students were introduced to the workshop. They were placed into teams and experienced team-building activities. Then they were oriented to the discovery and problem-probing methodology. Interactive sessions were used to determine what the adults knew. The entire group developed a list of questions they wanted answered about the high school completion programs. Typical questions were: How much does the program cost? What locations are offered? How long does it take? Can I work on my own while keeping a job? The students were then divided into three groups. These groups became the "experts" on their assigned program. During the second session students worked in their group to explore using the internet, telephone, dictionaries, brochures, the facilitator and anything else that would help them learn. They were reminded to think about the process while they were learning the content. We decided to embrace the motto, "Everyone teaches and everyone learns." At the third session groups were given time to determine the method for reporting back to the whole group and finally they presented what they had learned. Students were told that their opinion on how the process worked was valuable to the facilitator. The terms "content" and "process" were discussed and referenced often.

Findings:

With few exceptions, the participants in all workshops were extremely enthusiastic about this process. The one exception was at the Hispanic family literacy center. Language was a problem, since all but three participants did not speak English well enough to engage in the activities. Work had to be done through an interpreter. While most people in the workshops still remained in the GED or test mindset, people were beginning to embrace the idea of other programs and the possibility for choices.

The presentations given by the groups were well thought out and complete. Programs were explained in ways that were easy for everyone to understand. While there seemed to be a predisposition toward test taking, and the groups had a tendency to explain all programs in terms of what test needs to be taken to qualify, they were learning the other options. The emphasis on GED was still apparent since adults understand the concept of testing, and so it was difficult to introduce new concepts.

Valuable information was exchanged. People began to try new resources as they became aware of what was available. One gentleman actually enrolled in classes at the Woodson High School once he realized how close he was to meeting all the requirements. Participants became increasingly aware that they had little idea of what was available to them.

Most important, however, was the enthusiasm that the learners had toward the process:

"We like working in groups and getting to know each other."

"We feel better about ourselves, when we learn on our own and take charge of our learning."

"I feel more confident and I liked teaching others about what I learned."

"Why can't we learn this way all the time?"

The learning center staff who acted as observers during the workshops were also enthusiastic about the process. Group dynamics revealed changes in social interaction. One female participant who never spoke during the six months she had been coming to the learning center became the most vocal member of the group in which she participated. A gentleman who normally acts out in class became more reserved and said he had really learned lot.

Conclusions:

Clearly, this methodology was right for these adult learners. Participants in the orientation wanted to take charge of their learning and wanted the facilitator to allow them opportunities to explore and learn on their own. The adults liked working in teams and they learned from each other. This dynamic mirrors employee development and growth in the labor force in modern work environments. I believe, based on this research, that content is best learned when the discovery or exploratory learning method is practiced.

For many, the discovery method was a new way of learning. The students liked it and in all cases, with one exception (the Hispanic learning center), they did not want to see the workshop end. This methodology

most likely would also be appropriate for the ESL setting with some modification. The workshop could be presented at a slower pace and it could incorporate information on the ESL program offerings. It is my hope that the orientation workshop will become common practice and part of the intake process in Fairfax County Public Schools. Not only does it orient the adult learner to the content of what is available, but it also sets them on a course of learning through the discovery method. Once this workshop becomes routine practice, other areas such as assessment and counseling can be explored. ❑

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Orienting Adults to Program Options Using Small Group Research

Marti Giese, Adult High School Completion Program, Fairfax, VA.

Background:

I work in a high school completion program in a large, densely populated county adjacent to Washington, D.C. In the last five years the enrollment of non-native speakers of English and former welfare recipients in this program has increased considerably. I noticed that both of these populations have difficulty understanding the differences between program choices available to them. They make choices without asking questions or making comparisons about program options. I also noticed that once in the classroom, these adult learners want the teacher to direct all of their learning. They seem to be passive recipients to our services rather than actively motivated to engage in the rigors of pursuing a high school credential. Dropping out is not uncommon.

I believed that these adult learners needed to become more independent in their learning and decision-making about their education. I believed it is best for them to make informed decisions about which program is best suited to their needs based on a more complete understanding of the options. I believed that working together to ask questions, gather information, and make comparisons would help them make more appropriate program choices.

Inquiry:

What happens when groups of adult students are helped to research high school completion options as part of an orientation procedure?

Action:

I knew that a new orientation procedure would have to accommodate an extremely diverse group of people, those who could read and write little English and those nearly ready to complete a high school credential. An orientation would have to appeal to learners in a jail, in an ethnic housing development, and in community learning centers. People from a wide variety of cultures and educational experiences would attend as well. Finally, the orientation activities would have to be non-threatening enough to engage both the timid and confident alike.

A colleague, Donna Chambers, and I developed a three-session orientation workshop in which we facilitated small groups of adult learners through a series of research activities. Instead of the traditional approach to teaching that focuses on dispensing specified doses of content to learners, the design of our workshop provided a process — a progression of group research activities intended to help learners discover the workshop content for themselves.

In the first session learners got to know each other, voiced their purpose for pursuing an education, and came up with a list of questions as a method for comparing program options. By session end, they were divided into research teams, given a research topic (one of the program options), and offered an array of printed materials. Selection of specific materials was up to them.

During the second session we met in a computer lab to explore the internet as a tool for researching program options. Students also telephoned program offices to follow up on questions they were unable to answer with information they had thus far.

In the third session each research team reported to the large group what they knew about each program option. Each presentation was followed by questions from the audience about how program options would suit their needs.

Data Collection:

My colleague and I kept a journal during the weeks of the orientation workshops. In it we made a simple division between observations and reflections. We gave forms with these headings to teachers, tutors, and

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administrators who also observed the process. We collected the forms after each session. We consulted the adult learners in the workshop by asking a series of questions at the end of each session that focussed on what they had learned and how they felt about the activities in which they had participated. At workshop end, we asked the learners to fill out evaluation forms concerning the effect and value of the entire workshop.

Findings:

Because our approach focussed on process and relied on the learners to discover content, each of the workshops produced slightly different results. All of the groups, however, came away with an understanding of the differences between the program options. Students from the jail focused on which program would best support them when they left the jail. Mothers in the housing development discussed how they could juggle family responsibility and pursuing an education. Participants from the community learning centers talked about the content from an employment and community college perspective. Each was able to learn what he or she needed. The facilitators did not have to take responsibility for figuring out who needed what.

Since learners were motivated by personal need, they engaged in the process with enthusiasm. One observing administrator was surprised that a mother who had recently arrived in this country was willing to leave her two preschoolers with a woman she did not know so that she could continue to attend our sessions. An inmate from the jail volunteered that he regretted having missed the first session. And several people from the community learning centers asked why they had not been given this workshop before.

By the second session, learners demonstrated ownership for the work that was progressing. We found that some students voluntarily continued their research outside of class by making phone calls and going to the local library to use the internet. One man remarked, "I feel responsible because you are making me do the work."

The learners also demonstrated a sense of commitment to their assigned research groups. The teacher at the jail said, "There was a sense of responsibility and connectedness in the group. . . . In fact, one of the members had a terrible migraine headache, yet he stayed for the session because he did not want to let his group down." At the housing development an observing administrator remarked that it was wonderful to see a woman who had arrived in this country last year take responsibility for a newcomer. At one of the community learning centers, participants left the room after the third session with reluctance. Each stopped just outside the door to wait for the rest of the group to emerge. The whole group stayed together, talking and laughing all the way down the hall. The newly developed classroom community had been a new experience for them.

Within the three sessions, people began to help each other and a different pattern of classroom relationships began to emerge. One observer of the process summed it up:

"One of the more boisterous students became more subdued. . . . He was not the center of attention that he normally likes to be. The circle arrangement and group participation took away his power. . . and there was participation by those who usually feel shy, withdrawn or intimidated by the more vocal students."

Instead of looking to the facilitator for help, group members looked to each other for support. In this way, everybody became a teacher, and everybody learned.

Other patterns of thinking and acting changed, as well. One very shy and withdrawn student from a social center surprised us all by participating enthusiastically. Another quiet young man beamed about his accomplishment of making a phone call to gather information. He said people usually hang up on him when he uses the phone because they become impatient with his stuttering. One inmate remarked, "Since last week I learned that being a full time college student isn't such a bad idea. . . . Until this, I figured that it just wasn't for me."

Out of the support of this new found sense of community in the classroom came surprising statements of self awareness, seed thoughts that could change attitudes and quite possibly change lives. These self discoveries came to students at all levels.

"I am learning a little bit about myself like I need to further my education because if I don't I will not have a good job to support my family."

"What I am learning about myself is

that I'm not as dumb as I thought I was and if I put my mind to it, I can accomplish just about anything."

"What I am learning from this session is that distractions keep me from focussing fully on my objective...need to grow up and realize what's real important. That's what I've learned."

As a facilitator of growth, results such as these excited and inspired me. As a teacher, I wanted to know if I had given students the necessary learning skills they need for the future. So I asked each of them at the end of the workshop, "What have you learned through our work together?" They told me, "I learned to work in groups is very important, rather than try to get all the information by myself." Another said, "It made me realize that the telephone, the computer, and printed information is there to help me learn." And another student remarked, "The most important things I learned was how to make a list of questions, how to look for information, and these will help me make my decisions." It was satisfying for me to hear these kinds of comments.

Conclusions:

Using a process of group research to drive the content (instead of the reverse) allows adult learners to become involved and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. When this occurs learners can personalize the lesson to their own needs. Classroom attendance may be less of a problem; the drop-out rate may be reduced as well.

Working in teams to research information builds a sense of community where adult learners can learn and practice important life skills. Those who can explain, guide, and support, do. Those who need to learn these skills can do so from peers. Others who see the big picture can be informed by those who see detail and vice versa. Those who are good at organizing a plan can learn from those who are good at evaluating results.

In this open and low risk atmosphere everybody teaches and everybody learns far more than from a single teacher-centered lesson. It is where learning to learn happens.

In the coming months I hope to offer the orientation workshop to all perspective students in our program. I also intend to begin a series of staff development inservices for our instructors that will focus on the benefits and methods used in this approach to facilitate adult learning.

The next questions I plan to explore include:

- What is the minimum level of English needed to profit from this approach?
- How will we screen for minimum level of English?
- How can we help non-native students understand that asking questions is as important as finding answers?
- How can we help those students who need more time to personalize the information?
- How can we build in a learning style preference and study skills component? ❑

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Leveled Children's Literature and the Adult Learner

Marion Harley, Oak Grove Adult Education Center, Westmoreland County, VA.

Background:

I investigated whether leveled children's literature would prove to be enjoyable and profitable in helping the adult nonreader progress toward becoming a fluent reader. I chose to investigate this topic because occasionally I would hear someone state, "No adult wants to sit and read children's books." Many people assume that adults will be offended if they are handed children's literature to read. I take issue with the idea that having adults read children's books is a "no-no" because, personally, I love to read children's books. In addition, I have noticed too many other people taking great pride and enjoyment in reading children's literature to tiny tots.

I also chose to investigate this topic because I firmly believe that all nonreaders need to build a firnt foundation, built line upon line and precept upon precept, in order to progress in reading. I recall behaviorists stating that some adults have emotional problems due to the fact that they never learned to crawl. These adults were instructed to crawl in order to help overcome their problems. Likewise, I believe there is a connection between the non-crawler and the nonreader in that the nonreader also needs to go back to steps that were never taken in order to plug in missing links.

I had an inkling that if I presented adult non-readers with a print-rich environment of children's literature (which at every level of text difficulty would allow the learner to read for meaning and enjoyment right from the very beginning stages of his/her instructional program), then fluency would come.

My program, the Oak Grove Adult Education Center in Westmoreland County, incorporates adult basic and secondary education. I have adult low-level readers and/or adult nonreaders. Often I have noticed them struggling to read materials that are too difficult for them. This setting affords me the opportunity to place in the hands of the learner reading material that is at a level where he or she can be successful.

Inquiry:

What happens when adult learners are presented with leveled children's literature as their reading materials?

Data Collection:

Mr. Major is a 67-year old gentleman who entered my class unable to read, and he could barely sign his name. Despite these limitations, Mr. Major is a hard worker (although retired) and possesses the finer things of life. He was very committed to attending class and extremely punctual; absences only started toward the end of the year when some family problems arose or when he had special church obligations. Mr. Major would often state that he could not understand some of the other participants who started the program but did not continue.

I focused my research on Mr. Major because, although formal instruction had begun three years ago, he showed very little signs of progress. The two previous instructors had focused on teaching him the much needed basics of alphabet recognition and phonics. Attempts at reading were made but the books were given at random. I had high hopes that my theory about leveled children's literature would work for him. Mr. Major would read out loud during our sessions together.

As a researcher I wanted to have some insight into the role leveled children's books could play in a nonreader's life. Leveled children's books represent rich literacy experiences that offer, at every level from 1 to 20, explicit instruction for skills and strategies including phonics, word recognition and decoding. They offer continual challenges for the learner at every level for meaning. And they offer related illustrations. I began by conducting interviews with staff

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members who previously had worked with Mr. Major. I documented in observation journals what I saw and heard during ten 2-hour class sessions. I also audio taped, transcribed and/or video taped each session, which I analyzed for patterns of actions and reactions to the children's literature. My primary sources of data, however, were the Running Record that is a detailed procedure for observing, recording and analyzing a learner's oral reading behavior, and the pretests and posttests on high-frequency word lists. Other data were collected through literacy lesson plans that track fluent writing, word analysis and reading levels, and comparisons of writing samples to determine whether growth had taken place.

Findings:

Based on my observations, I am able to conclude that:

- Mr. Major's vocabulary increased (Pretest=9 words; Posttest=30 words)
- Mr. Major progressed from level 1 to level 10 in the 10 sessions we met.
- As Mr. Major watched himself progress from one level to the next, improvement came easier.
- Growth took place during the 10-minute writing spree (Pretest-6 words; Posttest=10 words).
- Writing was enhanced from phrases to sentences.
- Nonproductive coping mechanisms were beginning to dissipate, i.e., Mr. Major would spell words before attempting to pronounce them, such as c-a-t, c-a-t, cat. This nonproductive behavior began to be seen less frequently as he moved to higher levels.
- Mr. Major sometimes displayed intimidation when presented with a book that appeared to be wordy or lengthy.
- Mr. Major expressed discouragement when the first two readings of a book would go well but on the third or fourth rereading he made mistakes.
- Mr. Major still displays some letter-recognition/letter-sound confusions.
- Mr. Major did seem to be able to relate to the stories and found many of them amusing. Here's what he said about the children's books:

"I feel good about going up the levels." (2-17-99)

"I just read 16 pages!"

"Mr. Grump is me (chuckle, chuckle)." (3-10-99) [Mr. Grump is a story book character who is grumpy everyday until midmorning when he gets a kiss from his wife which turns him into a charming man.]

I began this project with the inkling that if an adult nonreader had leveled children's books presented to him/her, that person would progress toward becoming an independent, fluent reader. The results of the data overwhelmingly support this.

Conclusions:

The project worked well. When I continue this project in September, my hope is that there will be an expansion from one research participant to a small group because a lot of learning takes place amongst peers. There will be very little changed, but I will make some additions, i.e., read-along tapes, choral reading, more opportunities for learners to produce writing samples.

Although a book may be children's literature, if it is written at an inappropriate level for the learner, frustration will set in and very little learning will take place. On the other hand, this research suggests that if a readable text is used, the learner becomes confident to read the text independently through repeated readings. My next step will be to take Mr. Major from level 10 through level 20 by the continued use of leveled-children's literature which enables strategies and skills, perhaps previously taught in isolation, to be introduced and practiced in the context of a story. Once the Learner reaches level 20, what makes for having appropriate materials for adults? My inquiry journey continues❑

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When Learners Write about Work, Family, and Community

Terry McElhone, Literacy Volunteers of America, Louisa County, VA.

Background:

As a literacy organization director and tutor for ten years, I have frequently been asked for advice about teaching strategies when our language experience activities do not seem to work. "Connect" seems to be the operative word. How do our students connect with their literacy training? How do the students connect with their work-a-day worlds? Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) has had much success with the Language Experience Approach, in which the student dictates his own story and that story becomes the basis for his learning, because the activity reflects the student's life. The story reflects the student's interest and experience, and what could be closer to the student's life than work, family and community? Through the Language Experience Approach, I thought we might find the connection that would help tutors construct a long-term learning plan and that would help the students persevere. What will we learn from these stories if the student is directed to dictate his life experience in these areas? Of additional interest to me is the tutor/student relationship. It has a comfort component that is essential to achievement. When the tutor becomes concerned about the effectiveness of teaching strategies, unease creeps in and that uneasiness may be directly related to tutor attrition or burnout. Volunteers for the most part have no prior teaching experience and become anxious about their own capabilities.

Inquiry:

What happens when students write or dictate stories based on work, family and community?

Data Collection:

To begin the research I called nearly all of our 20 tutors and invited them to participate. Eight tutors and their students agreed. Students were asked to give permission to use their stories anonymously, and tutors were warned about the extra record keeping involved. All agreed. To track student attitude and level of acceptance, the tutors kept a journal in which they recorded their answers to the following: Is your student at ease in class? Is he or she prepared, having thought about the assignment?

I suggested nine prompts that each tutor could use to start the language experience process. The three prompts for work were: "Describe your dream job; Describe the worst work you ever had to do, not necessarily for money; Describe how someone else's job helps you." The three prompts for family were: "Describe your favorite relative other than a parent; Explain the pluses and minuses of an extended family; Describe how adults can help children who are not their own." And finally, the three prompts for community were: "What do you like about your hometown? What do you think it will be like here in twenty years? What businesses or industries should we have here?"

All the writings were collected and reviewed by three experienced teachers — a high school language arts teacher and teacher-mentor, a special education teacher, and a middle school teacher. Also, I reviewed the writings from my perspective as the intake person, having conducted the original interview, the assessment, and the tutor/student matches. As might be expected, not all the students participated fully so I did not get the numbers that I had hoped for. After reviewing all the writings, the four of us evaluated them using the guidelines for the GED essay. Using information from the intake procedure, I drew up a matrix adding the remarks from the student-tutor logs. Then I read the stories again with all the personal knowledge as background.

Findings:

Students who willingly, even eagerly, participated in the Language

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Experience Stories previously became anxious about these new stories. Suddenly the Language Experience took on new hubris. Now we were writing "essays." One student who regularly dictated 3,000 to 4,000-word stories about Native Americans and aliens from space was petrified. Tutors who confessed to being less than eager writers themselves were empathetic to their students' anxieties. Also, over the eight weeks, students grew less eager. These were students who had been in the program for some time and were usually prepared for their sessions. Even those few tutors who regularly emphasized writing noticed that the stories became shorter and less thought-out despite the week between subject assignment and actual dictation. However, the more advanced students produced more samples.

Students normally open and gregarious were dismayed apparently by the formality in their participation in this project. On the other hand, the stories show quite clearly the personality and the life experience of the student. One student in particular revealed a sense of humor that had not been apparent in his earlier writings.

I expected to see a maturation process both in content and in skills. Although the tutors would usually discuss the subject and then use the Language Experience stories to teach reading, spelling and other writing skills, expected improvements were not evident in any student. The mechanics of good writing need more than eight weeks to develop and so do observation skills. Participation in this project brought home a number of truths. Even eager students are intimidated by "writing."

Conclusion:

Was our hope of making connections a failure? Building new knowledge on the foundation of old — the kind of connection described by Dr. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., of the University of Virginia — could be expanded. When reading is hard work, even the local weekly newspaper goes unread. When writing is more than a signature, writing is rarer than an endangered species.

Here in rural Virginia, our students rarely have the time, money or transportation to explore beyond their immediate environment. Can we help them keep up with technology in a world that has evolved from spoken communication — the telephone to written communication — to the Internet? How can we as tutors prepare our students to access information? If we are preparing our students for meaningful employment and full participation in this wired world, we must concentrate on writing; building skill in spelling, grammar, punctuation and all the other elements of writing are needed to make communication work for both parties. We must intensify the process of teaching writing as a means of communication.

I have learned a great deal about how designing the question hones in on the core of the issue. The more specific the question, the more directed the data collection. We could continue working with the same students who are now more or less anaesthetized to their anxiety about writing. The tutor could then accompany the student along the highway leading to maturation in content and the mechanics of writing. Next time we shall place a great deal more importance on using computers and allowing the student to access the Internet. Becoming comfortable with technology will be invaluable in preparing students for the new millennium. ❑

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Why They Come: An Exploration into Retention and Motivation in an Adult ESL Program

Thomas Nowalk, Montgomery County Public Schools Adult ESL Program, Blacksburg, VA.

Background:

My ESL program in Southwestern Virginia has seen record enrollment for the 1998-1999 school year. A low-intermediate class and an advanced class make up our small program, and combined enrollment in these two classes has soared to 194 students. Though the large classes are sometimes difficult to manage for a single teacher, they speak of the effectiveness of my classes.

High enrollment tells only part of the story, however. Nine advanced students make up 44% of the total attendance hours for that class. While average attendance is 18 hours, 3 of those 9 students attended over 100 hours. Six of the same students who attended the advanced class do the same for the lower intermediate class, making up 30% of the total student attendance hours for that class. In short, many of the same students show up regularly in both classes. Of the 194 students enrolled for this year, 9 regulars in the advanced class and 6 in the low-intermediate class made up the bulk of attendance. As the same people attended both classes, we may say that 9 regular students out of a total of 194, or 5%, have carried the greater portion of attendance. The purpose of this research was to identify what motivated students to attend class. I sought to identify what attracted students to the class, so that I could then determine what measures the program could take to increase the 5%.

Inquiry:

Why, from the perspective of the students, do people attend class or not? What keeps them coming back?

Data Collection:

Qualitative researchers work with words and this study was no exception. Over five months of participant observation was conducted in both classes. Field observations of the classroom were recorded in anecdotal form, including quotations of student comments. Besides field notes, two focus groups were held with a mix of volunteers from both classes. Two participants in the focus groups were learners who had since dropped out of the program. Transcriptions of each taped session were included as part of the data. A third source of information resulted from student responses to class tasks designed by the teacher. The tasks included ten activities in which students completed a procedure for each activity: naming items, writing dictation responses, completing partial sentences. I further examined class documents such as surveys conducted in past classes and the entrance sheets that students filled out as part of class registration. In short, I examined class documents, focus group transcripts, and observations of students engaged in or talking about class activities.

Except for the field notes, all data collection relied on students' perspectives. Some field notes included comments from non-students: a literacy volunteer who observed a class; an uncle who sent a nephew to the class; an office manager who supports the program; a colleague who tutors ESL students; and some students who had dropped the class. As these individuals were in contact with people who observed program classes or had participated in the class, they provided information that was not usually accessible to me as teacher. Some of the informants, such as the colleague who tutors, regularly work with students from my program. For this reason, I included their perspectives with the students.

Analysis of the wording collected took two steps: transcribing the

material on to index cards and then sorting the cards into general themes. Each card included data in one of four forms: a single quotation from an informant; a single student comment of one to five sentences addressing a single topic; a written comment produced from a student document; or a line or two from the transcript addressing a single topic (a transcript quote). Cards were sorted into general themes; all data sources were pooled together to see what themes cut across them. What follows are the general themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Findings:

The adult learners in our ESL program, like other adult learners, bring to class needs that they expect to see met through instruction, yet, at the same time, those needs conflict with a number of competing demands in their lives. Students highlighted these conflicts during the focus group sessions, and repeated them during class tasks and class activities recorded in the field notes.

Needs were typically expressed as linguistic skills: grammar; pronunciation; and vocabulary. Students perceive these needs in response to pressures at work and in university classrooms. Some also want help preparing for standardized tests such as the TOEFL or the GRE. Perhaps the strongest need is that for practice. Students want to practice communicating thought or meaning in English. Students look for genuine opportunities to use English consistent with American usage or customs. They want the classroom to provide such opportunities. For some, the instructor is one of the few Americans that they regularly talk to.

Student conflicts include different life activities or circumstances that interrupt attendance. Some conflicts involve family issues such as pregnancy or childcare. Others involve personal issues such as illness or simply having no desire to attend class. Other personal conflicts may be travel, moving, or holiday activities. There are also practical conflicts such as transportation or snow days. The class schedule deters many from attending, too. Other ESL programs either create more scheduling conflicts or pull some students away from attending.

Needs and conflicts are personal. They relate to the individual student's effort to act on his or her needs within the context of many competing demands. But the individual acts on those efforts within the classroom, which is a social system. Interaction with the culture of the classroom, the particular classroom with its instructor, resources, and personalities, affects attendance, too.

According to student comments in class and during the focus group sessions, some aspects of the classroom culture attract students. What one student called "the mood of the class" is an important part of this, including the teacher's personality and students' general relationships with each other. The reputation of the class and the fact that it is free further attracts students. Students also noted the teacher's ability to coordinate with other public services such as Literacy Volunteers; the frequency of the class meetings; and particular instructional topics. Some class tasks also suggest that the teacher's methodology, such as group work or practicing short question-answer dialogs, attracts students.

There are aspects of the classroom culture, though, that deter some students. The open enrollment of the class with its mixed levels and overcrowding deterred some. A lack of textbooks and materials and even insufficient lighting in the classroom were pointed out in both the focus groups and the end-of-year survey. Instruction can also deter students. Unclear instructions on the part of the teacher, discomfort with participating in certain kinds of activities, and problems with comprehending in general, affected some students. The presence of dominating students who were more assertive than others, or the presence of certain groups of students who often spoke in their native language, made participation for some students difficult. Students usually pointed out these difficulties in class or after class, as recorded in the field notes.

To sum up, students feel pressure to learn certain language skills, particularly the skill to communicate meaning to Americans. But competing with this are other pressures in their lives that draw them away from the class. The culture of classroom, the personality of the teacher, and the kinds of instructional efforts and topics presented, all may pull students to the class if the classroom climate is welcoming and friendly. That the class is free further attracts learners.

Conclusions:

Adult learners live lives. They participate in an ESL class with one key goal: to learn language as a means to participate more easily in

American life. They want to participate in class in order to participate fully in the lives they lead.

My role as an ESL teacher, from this perspective, is often as a resource. Students want me to provide them with topics, expressions, and practice. I am expected to provide a variety of all three, with greater frequency than I have provided before. My adult learners see participation in life as competency in all three and they tend to judge their performance in the three according to traditional linguistic skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. What attracts many to my class is what they get from me as a resource — the chance to practice; the chance to learn a variety of topics; and the chance to learn how the topics are used in conversation. This is why, for example, phrasal verbs rank as important to so many of my students. They see phrasal verbs as one way to speak American.

In terms of improving attendance, this research study points to the importance of variety and frequency. Students want to cover a number of topics more frequently. They want competency in talking about certain subjects. And they want to have frequent opportunities to talk about the same topics but in different ways. This may suggest the need for including different texts. A Japanese student, during a focus group, talked about how useful it was to practice operations such as talking about how to put on clothing and tying shoes. Other students described the usefulness of other texts such as comparisons and narratives. It may be helpful, then, to practice with a variety of texts on a variety of topics. The issue of frequency further points to memory, which is a common complaint among students. For many, memory of what was learned in class easily slips away. But frequent practice opportunities may help with reinforcing memory. Summing up here, I believe that different kinds of texts, from narratives to dialogues and from comparisons to operations, with a variety of topics and expressions, practiced frequently over a number of classes, may attract more students.

Participation refers to placement, too. Throughout the data, the condition of having open enrollment with mixed levels of students was not preferred. Some students felt intimidated by higher level students. Other students felt uncomfortable working with lower level students. The data suggest that instruction will work better in the future if students participate according to their proficiency levels. Finding the balance between not overwhelming part of the class while at the same time challenging the other part, has not always been achieved. The loss of students at the highest and lowest levels of proficiency indicates that my program needs to work more on placement.

I see my role here, though, as more than a resource; I also see my role as an editor. My students want frequent feedback on their performance. They want to have clear criteria on their performance spelled out in a manner that allows them to judge for themselves. They want to know what works and what does not. Unclear directions on my part when assigning a class activity often lead students to creating criteria for themselves. In the future, classes should pay as much attention to performance criteria as to class goals. If students are to participate, they need to know the desired end and how they can judge if they have reached such an end effectively. It may help my class planning to focus more on ends, criteria, and activities.

Finally, I am also reminded that as an adult educator, there are some circumstances that are beyond my intervention. I have listed a number of points on how I plan to improve the classroom, which is where I have influence on my learners. There are instances, however, where my role as adult educator leads me to a spectator role, as conflicts ranging from bad weather to pregnancy, work schedules, or university level classes, distract my students from attending. It is quite possible that by enhancing my role as resource and editor, I may be less afflicted by the difficulties of spectator. Ultimately, what matters is how I perform these roles in a classroom culture that is non-threatening. As my students suggest here, attendance relies as much on the class mood as with class activities. Students want to participate to satisfy their needs without the pressure found outside the classroom. It is the personality of the teacher, too, that attracts students to class. Teacher personality and instruction work as the agent of that mood, competing with the many demands adult learners face living their lives. ❑

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Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998-1999 Report Series

Designing Instruction for Incarcerated Men

Beth Rohne, Virginia Department of Correctional Education, Haynesville, VA

Background:

I am an academic instructor for the Department of Correctional Education at Haynesville Correctional Center, a medium/ maximum security institution located in the Northern Neck of Virginia. I instruct approximately 54 incarcerated men daily in ABE, GED, or ESL. According to a law first enacted by the state legislature in 1989 and revised in 1991, every individual who enters the correctional system must have their basic skills assessed upon arrival. Any individual whose reading level falls below an 8th grade equivalency must be enrolled in the Literacy Incentive Program (LIP) in order to raise their reading level to 8.0 on the Test of Adult Basic Education and to achieve a series of life skill competencies. As originally conceived, participating in LIP and other programs in their treatment plan could earn inmates thirty days good time for every thirty served. Since 1995, however, the Virginia General Assembly requires all convicted persons to serve a minimum of 85% of their sentence thus eliminating the external incentive behind LIP. Inmates are still required to attend classes if LIP eligible or if they have no high school diploma or GED certificate, and if they expect to earn up to 15% off of their sentence and other eligibilities.

Once in my class, some students are eager to learn but others are not. I find myself often feeling as if I spend too much time trying to convince them that participating in an educational program is "good" for them beyond their annual reviews. I believe in one of the department's slogans, "You are here because of your past. We are here because of your future." But my average student does not seem to grasp the pertinence of adult education now or for the future. My preaching goes only so far and it takes too much of my energy.

I first became acquainted with the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future (EFF) model several years ago, before I began my work at Haynesville. I was intrigued by its effort to help measure what real-life effects participation in an adult education program was having in peoples' lives and its effort to develop a curriculum that would address skills adults say they need to fully participate in today's world. Working at Haynesville made me question how applicable the three roles that arose from EFF's research were in a prison setting. Did the roles of worker, community member, and family member "live" in incarcerated men's lives when they seemed to be so physically separated from them? Might connecting instruction to the roles they have in prison invigorate their learning? I decided to explore what might happen if I designed instruction around my incarcerated students' roles, but there were other things I needed to learn first.

Inquiry:

What roles do incarcerated men see themselves in? How do they think of education in relation to themselves in these roles?

Data Collection:

I introduced the EFF framework to the inmates as a launching point. Then, I developed classroom discussions and individual surveys about students' roles and how they were currently using skills garnered in class. I also asked them what skills they anticipated using in their future to fulfill their roles. I chose both oral and written forms of collection to gather more information from individuals who felt more comfortable using one format over the other. I purposely used differently sized groups to offer a variety of settings for them to interact in. Afterwards, I conducted small learning table sessions on goal setting to see if students would be able to include their roles in developing their individual learning plans. I also kept a journal of my reflections on class activities and events.

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Findings:

The students were able to identify goals for themselves within the framework of worker, family member and student. Some mentioned, for example, having more contact with children. Others mentioned receiving a GED. They were also able to identify skills that they need to fulfill these roles both inside and outside the institution:

- Writing a resume,
- Working with computers,
- Learning how to manage personal finances,
- Being able to read better to help others in their family.

They were also able to identify needs for personal growth including changing their attitudes, building their self-esteem, developing forms of self discipline, communicating and living with others, and improving family relationships.

When asked to identify how specific classroom activities apply to their lives, some reported only in terms of academic progress isolated within the classroom while others made vague connections. One inmate remarked, for instance, "Learning about something you never knew is always helpful."

However, when asked what prompts them to come to class, in terms of what they like and appreciate about it, they remark strongly on the personal benefits of participation. The following benefits were frequently noted:

- A classroom community,
- Increased motivation,
- Personal voice,
- An atmosphere encouraging inner reflection.

Conclusions:

Ultimately, the students' answers suggest an awareness that inner growth is foundational to fulfilling their roles. However, using an academic skills curriculum, I cannot directly "teach" personal growth in the same way I deliver academic instruction. Still, with an appropriate curriculum and classroom environment, I can support the development of positive attitudes, increased self-esteem and self-discipline, improved communication skills, and broadened skills for living with others. As a teacher, I must keep in mind the relevance of personal development to successful performance as workers, family members and students/ community members. This is especially the case for incarcerated adults.

Students need to know, through structure and leadership, that the teacher has high personal expectations of them as members of the classroom community. The classroom community must provide a positive and encouraging atmosphere where students feel comfortable asking for help from their tutors and where they can be certain that they will receive it. In such a guided community, their voice is listened to and they are allowed to choose the daily direction of their learning. The community offers guidance when at an impasse. Daily encounters with the curriculum in the classroom community afford students the opportunity for vital growth. Teachers and students must make the connection between the academic skills that students work towards and their overall growth as human beings. For example, goal-setting activities may address the developmental issues a student identifies as being relevant to achieving his goal, and they may also outline the academic skills that are necessary. When developing a curriculum, then, a teacher must keep in mind that these inner issues help to build the foundation for successfully fulfilling the roles each individual sees living out. ❑

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Guiding Teachers Through Student Input

Jane Roy, Arlington Education and Employment Program, Arlington, VA

Background:

The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) offers free, community-based English as a second language (ESL) classes, on a drop-in basis, at five sites in Arlington, Virginia. The classes, which are taught by volunteer teachers, are aimed at beginners. Potentially, there could be between seven to fourteen teachers at any one site and students could have contact with at least four different teachers in any one week.

The aim of the community-based classes is to teach life skills English. Most teachers follow a topic list that provides guidance on lesson objectives. For example, for three weeks the topic may be employment and lessons may focus on getting a job, keeping a job, and advancing on the job. Throughout the three-week period, teachers plan lessons based on employment related objectives. Generally, teachers like the concept of the topic list as it provides a focus for lesson planning and a framework within which all of the teachers are working. However, problems relating to duplication exist; several teachers may decide to address the same lesson objectives, for example. Teachers do sporadically communicate to each other what they covered in class, by e-mail or by writing in a logbook located at each site.

As the Volunteer Coordinator, it is my responsibility to recruit, train, and support the volunteer teachers. My interest, in terms of this project, was to explore ways of providing more support and guidance to the volunteer teachers. Two issues were addressed: communication between teachers and student input.

Inquiry:

What happens when teacher guidance is provided through student input?

Action:

A trial project was conducted at one site, building on the existing topic list through the creation of a Topic Notice Board (TNB). The process can be described as follows.

- Before the introduction of a new topic, teachers carry out a needs assessment focussed on the new topic.
- This information is recorded on the TNB, which is prominently displayed in the classroom.
- Teachers sign-up for the objectives that they wish to teach during the three-week topic period.

The idea was to improve guidance to teachers, not only on what to teach, but also on what other teachers are doing, thereby avoiding duplication. The mechanism for achieving this was increased student input through needs assessment. Although this was not addressed through the project, increased student input would, hopefully, make the classes more meaningful and relevant to students' needs, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning.

Data collection:

The project sought to discover what would happen when the new strategy was applied. I therefore gathered data that attempted to capture any changes that related to the teachers and the classroom environment. The trial project was conducted over a period of nine weeks and throughout that time I collected data through various means, including, e-mail correspondence, meetings with teachers, and a journal log with my own observations and reflections.

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Findings:

The concept of the TNB evolved through the pilot project and mid-way through the project, I came to the following conclusions:

- The teachers and myself, as an administrator, had different perspectives on the pilot project and whether it was for the teachers or students' benefit. The teachers thought that the project was not working because the students were not signing-up for the objectives on the TNB or telling the teachers what they wanted to study. From my perspective, it was not working because the teachers were not signing-up for the lesson objectives they would be teaching over the topic period.

- The mechanism for providing teacher guidance, i.e., student input through needs assessment, was proving to be stressful to the teachers rather than helpful. Difficulties stemmed from the fact that needs assessment was new to both the teachers and the students, classes were multi-level, and there were literacy issues for many students.

- The actual process was complicated and relied on the timely input of too many people to make it work effectively.

The situation led to discussions with teachers about the project and a meeting to discuss the way forward. Despite the difficulties, teachers were reluctant to abandon the project. Positive aspects were related to teachers working together and the concept of involving students. The TNB enabled teachers to act as a more coordinated team, aware of what others were teaching, and providing more integrated lesson objectives. The discussions led to a review of the concept of needs assessment into student topic awareness and it was agreed that the primary use of the TNB was a communication tool between teachers.

A very positive aspect of the outcome of the project was that the number of e-mails between volunteers about what they had covered in class significantly increased over the course of the nine weeks. Regular e-mails were generally sent the day after class and contained information about lesson objectives, the number of students and any new students, a self-assessment about how the lesson went, plans for next week's lesson, and mutual support and feedback. The e-mails provided important information to the teachers as they were able to link classes and lesson objectives and it reinforced the idea of teachers working together rather than individually. The increased communication did not include all teachers, however. Some teachers did not participate in the TNB or e-mail correspondence although teachers with e-mail had the option of accessing the information if they wanted to.

Eventually, volunteer teachers relied more on the e-mail communication than the TNB as a source of information. Obviously, the e-mails contained more detailed and useful information than the TNB, but they excluded those who did not have access to e-mail. Access to e-mail also affected perceptions of duplication. Teachers with access to e-mail tended to think that duplication was not a problem, presumably because it was controllable. A teacher without e-mail found duplication very frustrating, probably leading to the decision to opt out of the TNB project altogether by deciding to teach something different from the topic list objectives.

Conclusions and Implications

The TNB concept looked quite different at the end of the nine weeks. We moved from a position of providing teacher guidance through student input to one of developing a way for teachers to communicate more effectively. Participating in the project helped to clarify what was important for teachers, although different teachers have different needs and perceptions on what constituted guidance. E-mail is a very effective tool enabling teachers to easily communicate with each other and exchange important information. At the end of the trial project, it seemed that teachers preferred this means of communication to the TNB, which only provided minimal information. Unfortunately, this communication excludes those who do not have access to e-mail.

In terms of developing communication between teachers, there are several important implications for the volunteer program. The communication process needs to be self sustaining, i.e., not be dependent on any one person, volunteer coordinator or teacher, to make it work. If someone

wants to be a part of the process, it is important that the mechanism itself does not exclude him or her, by not having access to technology, for example. Before proceeding, however, it is important to find out why those who opted out did so.

With respect to needs assessment and increasing student involvement, this did not progress well through the project and it is something that needs to be addressed in the future. Any future development needs to take into account the continuous enrollment, multi-level classes, and training issues. ❑

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Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998-1999 Report Series

Taking a Closer Look at Student Retention

Tina Spencer, Newport News Public Schools, Newport News, VA.

Background:

I am the lead teacher at Denbigh High School in the Adult and Continuing Education Program, Newport News, Virginia. Year after year, I register many adults for my adult basic education class. By the end of each year, I realize a disturbing pattern; I only have a handful of adult learners who are still in the program when the class ends each May. Even though I start in early September telling all my learners that those still enrolled in the program when it ends in May will receive a certificate of completion, my end-of-the-year enrollment is always low. This year alone, I had over 50 adult learners who registered for my ABE class. In May, only 8 students received certificates.

In the past, I spent two nights a week teaching basic skills to my learners. I used several sources to help me decide how to teach these skills. Using information that I had gathered from short-term goals written by the learners themselves, I taught skills that I presumed the learners needed and wanted. Another source to help me teach the classes was the pretest that my adult learners took before starting my class. The final source I used was a pre-GED textbook series covering all subject areas on the GED test. I feel that the majority of my students value education, and I feel that they enroll with the intention of making better lives for themselves.

Inquiry:

So why do people who seem so dedicated drop out? Will it help if I change the set up of my class so that students work independently in a computer lab?

Action:

In mid February, I changed the way I taught the class. Monday nights remained the same with me teaching skills to the whole class. My learners asked questions during class whenever they needed to. As a whole group, we worked through problems to solve them. Wednesday night classes were set up differently. The learners came into a computer lab and worked on whatever they felt like they needed to work on. The choices during lab night were varied. Some of the learners chose to work on their keyboarding skills. Others practiced writing by using a word processing program. Many of the adult learners wanted to independently study the different academic areas covered on the GED test. They did this by entering a pre-GED program that had been previously loaded onto the computer. I walked around the class in the role of a guide or monitor. I answered very few questions. When questions came up during the Wednesday night sessions, the learners wrote them down in a notebook. These questions were saved until the following Monday when they were discussed as a whole group.

Data Collection:

I began collecting data simply by keeping a nightly journal in which I wrote down my observations of the adult learners. Not long into the research project, I began allowing five to ten minutes at the end of each class for my learners to also write in a journal. I asked them to write down their thoughts about what they had learned from each class and to try to tell how they would use what they had learned in their daily lives. In my observation journal, I wrote down thoughts and notations about how my learners reacted throughout the evening. As I read over the journals, I realized that they weren't really reflecting on how their learning could help them in their everyday life. They were simply restating exactly what the lessons were. This caused me to begin keeping field notes in which I documented my learners' comments as well as their reactions during class sessions.

Throughout the project, class activities provided additional data

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collection opportunities. An example of such an opportunity was the "snowball" activity we did during which my learners shared reasons why coming back to school was easy for them. For the second part of this activity, the learners had to share reasons why coming back to school was difficult for them. I also interviewed four of my peers who teach in the continuing education department. The interview focused on their worst and best experiences as a learner, then as a teacher, and lastly as they observed another colleague. I spent quite a bit of time analyzing this part of my data. I was amazed at how much insight I got from this data as it pertained to the issue of student retention. My final source of data was my attendance record book. Ultimately, this record book was a big factor in answering my research questions.

Findings:

Once I had collected all my data, it was time to study and analyze each piece. I rearranged each category several times. From studying and studying each piece of data, my findings became very clear:

- Changing the set up of my class did not make a difference.
- Working independently in a computer lab did not improve the attendance of my adult learners.

The adult learners who registered in my class came with a definite purpose in mind. This was supported by the short-term goals they were asked to write during registration. However, through the reflection journals, it was clear:

- My adult learners were not able to make the connection between the lessons I taught and their everyday lives.

Attendance was poor by the time the class ended in May. After analyzing the data collected from four of my colleagues, I have concluded that reasons for not returning to class are varied. Teachers being late for class and not providing students with clear directions cause students to stop attending classes. Students being embarrassed that others in the class know so much more than they think they know is another reason for stopping for awhile. The data also show that family emergencies can be another cause of students deciding not to come to class anymore.

Conclusions:

Personally, I know I will keep looking for ways to improve the attendance of my adult learners. Yet, after analyzing my data, more questions keep going through my mind. I would like to study different localities in our state one day to see if, or rather how many, adult learners actually do return to school. Would the goals of those adult learners returning to school change? Would adult learners really view getting their GED as a long-term goal and be willing to make more practical short-term goals? Also, would adults benefit from some type of counseling before entering continuing education classes? If those same 50 adult learners who came through my class this year had to attend a one-day session on goal setting, would they have still registered for the class? Maybe the answers to many of my questions have already been researched by my peers. The very next step for me will be to read more about what has already been studied in hopes of finding ways to help my adult learners make and reach practical goals in their lives. ❑

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"The Client vs. the Student": An Analysis of the Refugee Social Service System from the Perspective of an Adult Educator

Stephanie Wood, Families Transitioning to Work Program, Fairfax County, VA

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Background:

I am one of two teachers for the Families Transitioning to Work program in Fairfax County, Virginia. Families Transitioning to Work was jointly developed by Fairfax County Public Schools and the Department of Family Services to provide welfare-to-work clients with English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, employment readiness training, and authentic work experience. The Families Transitioning to Work students are limited English proficient refugees or immigrants. The majority are also clients of the Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare (VIEW) program and are, therefore, receiving welfare benefits and employment training for two years. In return for this assistance they must be involved in a work activity. The Families Transitioning to Work program fulfills the work activity requirement.

Since its inception, the Families Transitioning to Work class enrollment has been relatively small; between five and 20 people attend on a given day. We meet every weekday for two hours after the students' three-hour intensive morning ESL class. Daily interaction and the small class size have allowed me to devote attention to many of the students' questions and concerns regarding literacy, language, access to resources, and management of their obligations to various social service agencies. I embarked on this research project in order to learn more about the social service system in which my students were involved.

As an educator, why undertake such a study of social services? First, there is already much research and understanding in the adult education field that participation in learning activities may be hampered until other problems or stresses in learners' lives are resolved. Social service agencies play a key role in helping learners overcome stresses related to employment, child care, housing, transportation, and health care, to name just a few. At the same time they are trying to help, however, social service agencies contribute to the stress that refugees and immigrants experience. For instance, the Families Transitioning to Work class is only one of many programs in which these students participate; some are involved in programs at three or more agencies. However, the students' obligations to these agencies are sometimes unrealistic, and mandatory attendance at trainings and meetings often conflicts in terms of scheduling. I estimate that I have sometimes spent 3-5 hours per week making phone calls to various organizations in order to help students access services and resolve scheduling conflicts. I have become a de facto advocate at some time for many of these clients. A second reason for undertaking this study is that literacy scholars and practitioners have called for adult educators to understand how they fit into the larger social service system, and to decide the degree to which they want to support, enforce, or enhance that system. In order to make such a decision we need to understand the system more fully.

I hope that a systematic analysis of this system will help me and the Families Transitioning to Work program better serve our clients in terms of defining our employment preparation objectives to meet needs and fill gaps in services, and by reinforcing and complimenting other existing programs. In addition, I hope to gain a better understanding of this system so that I can help students understand what services are available to them and help them understand how to manage their responsibilities to each of these organizations. I also hope that the process and final products of this research will increase the understanding of colleagues at the various social service agencies regarding the extent of conflicting program requirements, the implications these have for the success of our mutual clients, and the potential for improved collaboration and coordination of programs.

Inquiry:

What are the various social services available to Families Transitioning to Work clients? What are the clients' obligations to these agencies? Where do these different obligations conflict? Which program has priority?

Data collection:

I conducted 2-hour interviews with representatives of four social service agencies in Fairfax County:

1) The Department of Family Services;
2) Maximus, Inc.;
3) Lutheran Social Services; and
4) Homestretch, Inc.

In addition, I collected documentation regarding welfare-to-work and VIEW policy, as well as training curriculum materials from the different organizations. From the Families Transitioning to Work students I collected documents such as notices from various agencies informing them of trainings, meetings and other obligations. I also documented conversations with the students and organization representatives in the process of helping clients resolve problems or access resources at these various agencies.

Findings:

Different Funding and Policy Streams

Clients receive services from many different agencies at the local level. The funding and policy these local agencies must interpret is channeled through different federal agencies. The following chart depicts a sampling of agencies and the social services they provide in Fairfax County, Virginia. Those interviewed for this study are indicated in bold type.

Among these programs, unfortunately, policies surrounding service delivery and client responsibility often conflict. This places some clients between a rock and hard place when they participate, as most do, in more than one program.

Similar Training Curricula within Dissimilar Time Frames

Each of the four organizations provides and requires employment and/or life skills training. Curriculum content is similar and/or complimentary across programs. Employment preparation topics include: job search strategies; interviewing and resume writing; job retention strategies; appropriate dress; sexual harassment; safety; computer training; and public transportation. Life skill training topics include: personal finance; tax filing; banking; parenting; nutrition; shopping; stress and anger management; drug and alcohol abuse. However, the length of training varies from one program to another. VIEW/Maximus, Inc., offered new clients an intensive, week-long job search/life skills training, and additional two-hour workshops once or twice a month. Lutheran Social Services provides initial pre-employment trainings of 4-5 days and a four-day computer training program. Homestretch, Inc., requires clients to attend its life skills program every Wednesday night from September until June, with monthly mandatory meetings in the summer.

Each organization either provides or refers clients to ESL programs. Again, the most significant difference in ESL seems to be the length of the program offered or required. VIEW encourages clients to take ESL and

Federal Agency	State or Local Entity	Program/Services
Department of Health and Human Services	Fairfax County Department of Family Services (DFS)	**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides financial assistance - formerly AFDC.**
Department of Health and Human Services	DFS	**Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare (VIEW) is the work component of TANF and provides employment training and job search support. Until 1/99, VIEW training and management subcontracted to Maximus, Inc.**
Department of Agriculture	DFS	Food Stamps Pr[illegible]m
Department of Labor	DFS	Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Welfare-to-Work Program provide pre-employment training.
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Falls Church Municipality	**Homestretch, Inc. provides two-year transitional housing until clients are self-sufficient or get into public housing**
Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement	Commonwealth of Virginia	**Lutheran Social Services (LSS): Virginia Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP) and the Targeted Assistance Program (TAP) provide training and job search support. Matching Grant Program provides shorter-term start-up financial assistance.**

covers this cost for the two years that they are eligible for VIEW services. Lutheran Social Services offers ESL on-site and requires 15 hours of ESL instruction for new arrivals. They also refer some clients to intensive ESL classes until they get a job. Homestretch, Inc. encourages clients to work full-time and has stricter limits than the other organizations interviewed regarding the time that ESL and employment training can satisfy initial work requirements. Yet, it will soon start ESL classes in-house and will require all clients to attend ESL at Homestretch, Inc. and not at other schools.

Conflicting Inter-Agency Scheduling

This research was born from the realization that many of the Families Transitioning to Work students were asking their teachers to help them resolve scheduling conflicts they were having with regard to the trainings and appointments that various social service agencies required them to attend. Early in the Families Transitioning to Work program some clients received notices to attend mandatory trainings at Maximus, Inc., Lutheran Social Services, and Homestretch, Inc. between 12:30 and 2:30 — the time they were required to be in Families Transitioning to Work class. For most clients, these scheduling conflicts were easily resolved. Once Lutheran Social Services, Homestretch, Inc., and Maximus/ VIEW workers became aware of our program, they excused the clients from their respective trainings.

However, scheduling conflicts between Homestretch, Inc., Maximus, Inc., and the Fairfax County Public School Adult Evening ESL program continue. Some of our students have been required to be in three places at once on Wednesday nights! Homestretch, Inc. holds its mandatory life skills training Wednesday evening, and VIEW/ Maximus, Inc. also schedules mandatory workshops at that time. Homestretch, Inc. clients who attend intensive evening ESL classes Monday through Thursday, because they work during the day, are forced to miss 25% of the ESL class each term.

Differing Client Requirements and Obligations to Agencies

Different organizations have different work activity and training requirements. Some clients have been required to attend training by one of the organizations while another agency required the client to work full-time. There is currently little coordination among agencies to address this conflict.

Recently, one FTW student was required to attend full time English and the FTW program by her DFS/ VIEW case manager, while her housing sponsoring organization, Homestretch, Inc., required her to go to work full-time. The involvement of FTW teachers precipitated the first meeting between Homestretch and DFS/VIEW managers, and stayed the eviction of this student and her family from the housing program. However, this policy conflict has not yet been resolved at the program level.

Conclusions:

The largest gap in refugee social services in Fairfax County, Virginia is the lack of coordination and communication among agencies. This results in inefficiency and even conflict instead of complimentary and reinforcing programs. Furthermore, non-English speaking clients face great challenges in understanding, maximizing their benefits from, and meeting their responsibilities to this social service system.

The organizations interviewed for this paper differ on the amount of ESL they require for their limited English proficient clients. At the same time, the organizations that focus less on the importance of ESL are also developing their own in-house ESL programs. I see this as a trend toward "one-stop shopping" which parallels the consolidation of public assistance services. This may not be contradictory, however. In-house ESL programs offer the organizations more control over how much ESL is provided, offer more control over the content of ESL instruction, and keep the referral funding in-house.

Legally mandated welfare reform has swung the pendulum from a focus on education and training to a culture of work first. The most interesting part of this analysis for me is that the government, in this case the Department of Family Services, has developed a flexible interpretation of VIEW policy for ESL clients, while the semi-private organizations interviewed for this paper have a more narrow interpretation. The Department of Family Services/VIEW offers the most support in terms of time and funding for English and other training for the two years the clients are eligible for VIEW services. Also, the Department of Family Services collaborated with Fairfax County Public Schools Adult Education to develop the Families Transitioning to Work Program giving ESL clients additional classroom and on-the-job training, which at the same time fulfills the work activity requirement for these students. The semi-private organizations interviewed for this paper, encourage or mandate clients to get a job as soon as possible. Although initial job placement may be successful, I wonder about the long-term job retention of these individuals and their ability to function and succeed in this country without more investment in English literacy skills.

This paper calls for welfare to work practitioners to recognize that the support needs and obstacles to employment of foreign-born clients may be very different than those of

	VIEW	*Lutheran Social Services*	*Homestretch, Inc.*
Job Search Criteria	All clients have to conduct an initial job search of 40 documented contacts in one month.	The client must attend all appointments with caseworkers and interviews.	Must fill out five applications per week.
Work Activity Requirements	The date TANF is approved, the client must be employed or in a work activity within 90 days for 30 hours per week.	The client must accept a job offer.	Each adult must be working for a minimum of 30 hours per week. ESL or job training is allowed to fulfill this requirement for an unspecified time that is determined on an individual basis and is subject to change at the discretion of the executive director.
Recognition/Role of Families Transitioning to Work	Fulfills the work activity requirement.	Some clients are referred to the FTW program until they gain employment.	Does not fulfill the work activity requirement.
Training Requirements	Must attend initial and periodic employment and life-skills workshops.	Must attend an initial one-week employment training course.	All adults and teenagers must attend weekly Wednesday-night life skills trainings. The only excuse for absence is a doctor's excuse. If a client has three unexcused absences they are evicted from the program.
Other requirements	*Not in scope of this paper.		Families must pay 30% of their gross income to Homestretch, Inc. for rent. Within one month, the family must get credit counseling to re-establish or clean up their credit history. Within three months, the family must sign up for project-based Section 8 housing.

American-born participants. In order to better understand these differences, continued analysis of welfare programs and post-welfare follow-up studies should be disaggregated by the variable of English literacy. Further research should also compare the accountability systems and indicators of success of the various agencies in an effort to make their working assumptions and program philosophies more overt, and ultimately improve the coordination of services at the client level.

I plan to share the finalized documents from this research with the agencies and individuals interviewed and solicit feedback from them. I would like to then research other states' collaboration between adult ESL programs and public and private social service agencies. Finally, I would like to review the Families Transitioning to Work program objectives in light of this analysis. What role should Families Transitioning to Work and other adult education programs play as social service advocates for our students? ❑

Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998-1999 Report Series

The Virginia Adult Education Research Network supports practitioner research as staff development. In practitioner research, groups of teachers, tutors, and administrators use qualitative inquiry methods to systematically explore issues or problems, arising from their own practice. Practitioner research is a long-term learning process that occurs, over the course of months, within a supportive group and continues as researchers carry out projects in their classrooms and programs. Through brief reports that they write practitioner researchers contribute their knowledge to others in the literacy education field. The complete series of Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998-1999, is available on the Internet at http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb/vaern.html

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